

The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
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No. 115

JANUARY 7TH, 1942

DEAR MEMBER,

The opening of the new year is marked by the transformation of the war into a world war, the far-reaching consequences of which our minds have hardly as yet had time to grasp.

The Prime Minister has shown once again his unequalled power to grasp instantaneously the significance of a crisis and to give it appropriate expression in speech and action. Just as he gave instant direction to the opinion of a bewildered world by his memorable broadcast on the Sunday on which Germany invaded Russia, so when America entered the war he lost not a moment in forging the closest bonds of Anglo-American understanding and co-operation by a visit to Washington which is likely to rank among the most dramatic and symbolic incidents in history. Something of what it may imply is suggested in a striking number of the broadsheet *Planning*¹ published on December 9th, before the Prime Minister's visit to America, and presumably sent to press before the aggression of Japan. The sharpness with which it states the issues is an invaluable aid to clear thinking about the future.

"BRITAIN AND EUROPE"

The statement begins by making clear the presuppositions on which the argument is based.

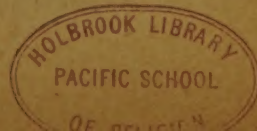
The first is that "all problems of politics are at bottom problems of power. Power, not merely in the sense of physical force, but in its widest meaning, physical, economic and moral, is the necessary basis of all forms of organised human society." No political arrangement for the future, therefore, has any chance of enduring unless it is based on a thorough analysis of the constituent elements of power in the modern world.

The second is that no political settlement will work unless it is recognised that "power entails corresponding responsibilities which must be clearly defined and accepted."

The third ground of the argument is that changes are taking place in the technical basis of civilisation which have completely undermined the pattern of power relations hitherto existing on the continent of Europe. In the past national sovereignty has not been incompatible with the realities of power. But in the altered conditions the essential elements of power are beyond the reach of a small state; it cannot, for example, provide itself with 5,000 aeroplanes. The world is moving irrevocably to a new international distribution of power. There can be in the future only a few large groups under the domination or leadership of one or more great Powers.

What the war will determine is which of the Great Powers will exercise this leadership and on what principles it will be exercised. If the Axis is victorious the world will be organised under the domination of Germany and Japan. The principle of organisation

¹ Issued fortnightly. Annual subscription, £1. P.E.P. 16 Queen Anne's Gate, London, S.W.1. The subject of this issue is "Britain and Europe," and it is a continuation of an earlier number on "The Future of Germany" which was summarised in C.N.-L. No. 95.



will be domination by the master race ; other peoples will be reduced to an inferior status and forced to serve the interests of the *Herrenvolk*. If the Allies win, leadership in the world will rest with the Anglo-Saxon peoples, the Russians and the Chinese. In that case it may be hoped that the "principle of organisation will not be racial domination but the co-operation of free peoples under responsible leadership, in which the smaller peoples will have both the opportunity and the obligation to play a part often out of all proportion to their size."

Now it is especially in Europe (the argument of the broadsheet continues) that the existing power relationships have broken down. Hitler has clearly seen this, and Europe will owe to him, as it has owed to Napoleon, a number of achievements of permanent value. It is no longer a question of whether Europe should remain united, but only in what form and under what leadership. Decisive leadership is indispensable. Without it the old bad habits of sovereignty, neutrality and national animosity will assert themselves and Europe will sink into chaos. The demand of the broadsheet is that Britain, as the outpost in Europe of the Anglo-Saxon world, with the support of America and the Dominions and in close working agreement with the U.S.S.R., should accept that leadership in all its implications. That means that this country must be prepared to take whatever measures may be necessary to establish, in co-operation with its continental allies, effective military control, which Germany can have no hope of being able to challenge.

It is clear that what is here proposed involves a complete change in our habits of thinking. It is a question, "of effecting a revolutionary change in our whole outlook and way of life." It means the acceptance of responsibilities of which this country has never dreamed and which very few are as yet ready even to contemplate.

What is intended is not the substitution of an Anglo-Saxon, or an Anglo-Saxon and Russian, imperialism for a German imperialism. That would be a complete misunderstanding of the broadsheet. Everything hinges on the difference between the Anglo-Saxon and the German political doctrines. In all social power there is not only an inescapable physical and material element but also an inescapable moral element. Unless political power is rooted in consent, it must always remain unstable. This vital moral element in power is what the Nazi system lacks. The Anglo-Saxon political tradition, on the other hand, is based on "respect for the rights and interests of individuals and groups, and a belief in power as a means to an end, namely, the general welfare, and not as an end in itself."

The aim is not Anglo-Saxon domination but the establishment, by the only means by which under existing conditions it can be established, of the indispensable framework of order and security in which a new Europe can grow. What is desired is a Europe "which all its citizens have a common interest in maintaining and furthering, and to which all of them, Germans and Italians equally with Danes, Dutchmen, Spaniards and Englishmen will come to feel a loyalty commensurate with their loyalty to their own country."

It is recognised that three conditions are essential for the carrying out of such a policy. The first is a genuine and growing understanding between the Anglo-Saxon and Russian peoples. This will be the task of more than one generation, but the foundations must be laid now. The attitudes which will govern Soviet policy for many years to come will be largely determined by what Britain and America do, or fail to do, in the hour of Russia's crisis.

Secondly, this country can fulfil the rôle proposed for it, only if its national leaders learn to think in European terms and are prepared, where necessary, to subordinate British interests to the larger good of Europe as a whole. This presupposes a radical change both in the outlook of British statesmen and in national habits of thought, and public action which will convince the peoples of Europe that the change is real.

Thirdly, it is necessary to remember that "the lasting leadership is leadership by example, and that the peoples of Europe will look to us for leadership just so long as they see in us a dynamic and forward-looking society. We have got to set our own house in

order, and at the same time to work out for ourselves and for Europe a new and more satisfying social philosophy than either we ourselves have possessed in the past or than Europe has been offered in the existing continental ideologies."

ANGLO-SAXON RESPONSIBILITIES

What are we to say to these bold and, when their implications are grasped, staggering proposals? There are obviously many points which demand the most careful scrutiny. Comment must be limited here to one or two issues which specially concern us as Christians.

In the first place, there is no reason why we should as Christians refuse to give these proposals unprejudiced examination because they represent a break with the hopes of political liberalism and are based on a frank recognition of the power element in politics. To "draw the thing as one sees it for the God of Things as they are" is not merely a legitimate attitude for Christians, but one demanded of them. There is no Christian virtue in clinging to the ideas and shibboleths of a world that has gone. Is it a fact that the realities of power have created a situation in which the only real choice is between the German domination of Europe, or a perpetually renewed attempt by Germany to secure that domination by war, and the unchallengeable assumption of leadership by some Power or Powers imbued with more liberal ideas? If so, the question who is to determine and control the framework within which the life of the peoples of Europe will develop must be settled once for all. Technical advances in armament make this possible. If it is, in fact, in the power of the Anglo-Saxon peoples, in co-operation with the Russians, to provide and maintain the necessary framework, the responsibility must be accepted. To refuse it would be to desert the peoples of Europe in their fundamental need, which in the temporal sphere is the need of security, and to cast away the opportunity of playing a creative part in shaping the future of mankind.

Secondly, what should engage the attention of Christians in these proposals is that they are charged with a sense of mission. This is a note which has been too long absent from British foreign policy. That policy has been hesitant and vacillating because it has lacked any clear purpose. The world has not known what Britain stood for. The P.E.P. broadsheets are issued as a rule after wide consultation; if the proposals made in this issue are the expression of any broad tendency of opinion, and, in particular, if they represent, or should come to represent, in any considerable degree the mind of the younger generation, it would be the sign of an awakening consciousness of a national destiny to be fulfilled.

That a nation should regard itself as having a mission is dangerous. As Nazism has shown, the idea may take a demonic form. But in what other terms are we to describe the humble acceptance of the tasks which history may be laying upon us? The mission to which this country is called by what is best in its tradition is to extend among mankind the values of liberty, toleration and respect for the individual, which are the antithesis of unregulated power. While these are not exclusively or peculiarly Christian, they are compatible, as the Nazi system is not, with the Christian conception of life, and derive their inspiration, in part at least, from Christian influence. If we are permitted to be the champions of these values it is not because of any superior virtue in ourselves, but because we are heirs of a great tradition. In so far as they are ours, it is not by merit but by grace. This was doubtless in the mind of the Prime Minister when in addressing the American Congress he spoke of "some great purpose and design being worked out here below, of which we have the honour to be faithful servants."

To be conscious of a mission is to enter the sphere of religion. It means a surrender to divine or to demonic powers. If the nation were to become possessed by the conviction that it had a historic task to fulfil, new spiritual possibilities would be opened up, and would bring with them at the same time new spiritual dangers.

If we take the tasks of history seriously, we have, in the third place, to concern our-

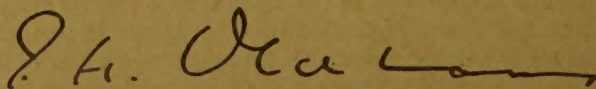
selves deeply with the question whether we are capable as a nation of meeting the demands made on us. The House of Commons was asked not long ago, in a striking speech by Mr. Austin Hopkinson, to face this issue.¹ What, he asked, have we to set against the passionate belief which leads millions of young men and women to fight and die for the vile creed of Nazism. "Do we believe in anything at all?" The assumption that material security and comfort are the chief ends of existence has, as Mr. Hopkinson insisted, eaten deeply into our life. The craving for pleasure and self-indulgence, the disinclination for what demands thought and creative effort, the reluctance to take responsibility are widespread among us. While we are heirs of a high political tradition, our failures to live up to it are manifold. The outside world is doubtful about the sincerity of our professions. If we have learned something of the wisdom of a policy of give and take and of respect for individuality, we have still a long way to go in understanding the point of view of other peoples. Our knowledge of continental peoples is wholly inadequate for European leadership. We are very far from having grasped the truth that we can give to others only if we are at the same time learning from them. In all these respects there must be a fundamental change of mind, if we are to be in any sense equal to the tasks which the future holds. But the awakening of a sense of mission is a force that can help to bring out the change by evoking the qualities it demands.

The conversion which is necessary must take place at two levels. The one is the growth in the community generally of a new moral purpose. But this will come about only if there is at a deeper spiritual level the whole-hearted and passionate commitment of some to a new set of values and a new way of life. Both ends have to be sought simultaneously.

It is a relevant and interesting fact that Mr. T. S. Eliot has recently made a selection from the poems of Rudyard Kipling and published them with an introductory critical essay, which is intended to assist the reader "to approach Kipling's verse with a fresh mind, and to regard it in a new light, and to read it as if for the first time."² Kipling's vision of the British Empire was different in important respects from the vision of their task which the Anglo-Saxon peoples need to-day, but we can gain from him an overpowering sense of a work to be done, a law to be obeyed, a price to be paid to the full. And over a period of more than forty years there sounds in his verse a recurring note of humility—of man's inescapable dependence on a higher Power.

"The tumult and the shouting dies ;
The Captains and the Kings depart :
Still stands Thine ancient sacrifice
An humble and a contrite heart."

Yours sincerely,



¹ Hansard, November 13th, 1941.

² *A Choice of Kipling's Verse*. Faber and Faber, Ltd., 8s. 6d.

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